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# A THEORETICAL MODEL AND EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITE USERS' SWITCHING INTENTION

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## Abstract

*Customers' post-adoption switching behavior among competing service providers, particularly among different online Social Network Sites (SNSs), is gaining increasing attention from both information system researchers and practitioners, as the size of user base is both a selling point and a source of revenue of SNS service providers. In this study, we draw on the uses and gratification theory to identify factors motivating an individual to switch SNSs. In addition, informed by social identity theory, we explore how individuals' social identities on their current SNSs moderate the effects of the motivating factors on their intention to switch to a more attractive SNS. The results of our survey study reveal that the perceived relative values of a competing SNS (when compared with the user's current SNS) positively influence his/her intention to switch to the competing SNS. However, the positive impact of perceived relative values on switching intention is mitigated by the user's perception of his/her salient social identity on his/her current SNS. This study has significant implications for both academics and practitioners.*

*Keywords: Switching behavior, switching intention, uses and gratification theory, social identity theory, social networking sites.*

# 1 INTRODUCTION

Social networking sites (SNSs), such as Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, and most recently Google+, are websites on which users “present themselves, articulate their social networks, and establish or maintain connections with others” (Ellison et al., 2007, pp., p. 1143). Since the phenomenal success of Facebook in mid-2008, SNSs have been gaining immense popularity, offering a new platform for advertisers to market products/services and engage customers. According to an eMarketer (2012) report, advertisers invested US\$7.72 billion in SNSs in 2012, representing an approximately 50% increase from 2011, and the advertising investment in SNSs is expected to reach US\$12 billion by 2014. As nearly 77% of SNSs rely on advertising revenue to sustain their business model, accumulating a large user base is among the SNSs providers’ top priorities (Johnson, 2012). SNSs with a vast sustainable user base are not only more popular, but also more profitable compared with their competitors.

The ever intensifying competition among SNSs over users has drawn the attention of both academics and practitioners to SNS users’ post-adoption *churn* or *switching* behavior. Because of the web 2.0 infrastructure, upon which SNSs are founded, an individual’s intention to switch SNS no longer depends solely on his/her evaluation of the new SNS, but is increasingly constrained by the extent to which the individual identifies with his/her current SNS (Cheung & Lee, 2010). Through frequent interaction with other users on his/her personal network or other online groups on an SNS, an individual develops a sense of social identity (i.e., an awareness of his/her membership in an SNS community as well as emotional and evaluative significance of such membership) (Cheung & Lee, 2010), which may help build up the individual’s resistance to other attractive SNSs and deter his/her intention to switch. The predominant focus of prior research on customers’ evaluations of their current or competing service providers (e.g., dissatisfaction with current service providers (e.g., Kim et al., 2006), availability of attractive alternatives (e.g., Zhang et al., 2008), and cost associated with initiating with a new provider (e.g., Cheng et al., 2009)) as salient determinants of switching intention leaves a ***theoretical gap*** relating to how a user’s social identity within his/her current SNS community influences his/her decision to switch to another SNS, a gap that we seek to address in this paper.

The reminder of the paper proceeds as follows. We first review relevant prior studies on switching behavior, and introduce the theoretical foundation for this study. We then present our research model and related hypotheses. After that, we introduce our research methodology and discuss the results from data analysis. We conclude this paper with discussion of theoretical and practical implications and limitations of this study.

## 2 THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The uses and gratification theory and social identity theory serve as the theoretical foundation for this study. Drawing on the uses and gratification theory, we first identify factors motivating SNS users’ to switch from their current SNS to a competing SNS. Informed by social identity theory, we then examine how the impact of these motivating factors is mitigated by users’ social identities in their current SNS.

### 2.1 Prior Research on Switching Behavior

Switching behavior has been investigated extensively by both marketing and IS researchers. Keaveney (1995) is among the early studies that explored determinants of customers’ switching behavior in different service industries (e.g., beauty salons, auto mechanics, and insurance agents). Similar research has been conducted on other service industries, such as mobile service providers (e.g., Kim & Yoon, 2004), electronic retail platforms (e.g., Gupta et al., 2004), and public transit services (e.g., Lai & Chen, 2011). This stream of research has identified customers’ *satisfactions* with their original service provider and their perceived *switching costs* as important factors inhibiting switching intention.

Recent years have seen an increasing number of studies on individuals' switching behavior with regards to information technologies. For instance, Keaveney and Parthasarathy (2001) identified behavioral, attitudinal, and demographic factors discriminating *continuers* and *switchers* of Internet service providers. Kim et al. (2006) investigated the effects of *satisfaction*, *alternative attractiveness*, and *switching costs* on users' intention to switch emails. Hsieh et al. (2011) examined the positive effects of extrinsic and intrinsic motivations on individuals' intention to switch social media websites, as well as the moderating effect of *switching costs*. A number of studies have also drawn from the Push-Pull-Mooring model (Moon, 1995) to categorize factors affecting users' intention to switch IT service providers (Lui, 2005), blog services (Zhang et al., 2008; Zhang et al., 2009), SNSs (Cheng et al., 2009), and online games (Hou et al., 2009).

However, previous studies on switching behavior in SNSs have focused primarily on individuals' evaluation of the current/competing SNSs (e.g., dissatisfaction with current service providers (e.g., Kim et al., 2006) and availability of attractive alternatives (e.g., Zhang et al., 2008)) as well as the costs (e.g., time and effort) associated with initiating a new service (e.g., Cheng et al., 2009), without considering the potential influence of the individuals' social identities in their current SNSs in constraining their decision to switch to other, more attractive SNSs. This study aims to fill this gap by proposing and empirically validating a theoretical model developed on the basis of the uses and gratification theory and social identity theory to understand users' switching behavior in the context of SNSs.

## 2.2 The Uses and Gratification Theory

The uses and gratification theory assumes that individuals use mass media to gratify their needs (Katz et al., 1973; Katz et al., 1974). According to this theory, an explanation of individuals' behavioral intentions necessarily involves an examination of their motivations and the values they seek to gratify from engaging in the behavior. The uses and gratification theory has been widely adopted to study the usage of various traditional media, including television (e.g., Conway & Rubin, 1991), radio (Mendelsohn, 1964), and newspaper (Elliott & Rosenberg, 1987), as well as new media (e.g., the media on the Internet) (e.g., Bhattacharjee, 2001; Grace-Farfaglia et al., 2006; Park et al., 2009). It has been validated as a powerful tool for understanding the reasoning behind individuals' behavioral intentions. Therefore, in this study, we draw on this theory to identify various salient values an individual seeks to gratify from SNS usage. Further, as an individual tends to treat their current service provider as a "comparison level" against which the attractiveness of a competing provider is determined (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), we conceptualize the salient values in a relative term to represent the *relative value* of a competing SNS compared to the one currently being used.

## 2.3 Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) describes an individual's self-concept as a composition of a *personal identity* (encompassing idiosyncratic characteristics such as abilities, traits, interests) and a *social identity* (referred to an "individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of this group membership") (1972, p. 292). *Social identity* "creates and defines an individual's own place in society" (1972, p. 293). While the antecedents to the formation of *social identity* include the prestige of the group, distinctiveness of the group's norm and practices, and most importantly, factors related to group formation (e.g., interpersonal interaction, similarity, liking, shared goals, common history, and so on), the consequences of an individual's salient social identity include conducting activities congruent with their salient identities, the traditional outcomes of group formation (e.g., intra-group cohesion, cooperation), and reinforcement of antecedents of group identification (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). In line with the social identity theory, a SNS user's salient social identity arises through his/her interactions with other users on the SNS, and this social identity in turn bonds him/her to the SNS community (Cheung & Lee, 2010; Ren et al., 2012). Thus, when encountering a more attractive competing SNS (based on an evaluation of the needs that can be satisfied by using the SNS), an individual with a salient social identity in his/her current SNS will be less likely to switch to the competing SNS, when compared to an SNS user who has not yet developed such social identity.

Therefore, in this study, we adopt *social identity* as the contextual constraint that mitigates the positive impact of *relative values* (of a competing SNS) on SNS users' switching intention.

### 3 RESEARCH MODEL AND HYPOTHESES

The research model for this study is depicted in Figure 1. As the positive relationship between behavioral intention and actual behavior has been established in prior research, we focus on SNS users' *switching intention* in this study (Ajzen, 1991) and define it as the likelihood that SNS users will switch from their current SNS to a competing SNS.

Drawing on the uses and gratification theory and social identity theory, we posit that SNS users' perception of the *relative value* of a competing SNS (compared to their current SNS) positively influences their intention to switch to the competing SNS. In addition, SNS users' perception of the strength of their *social identities* on their current SNS weakens the relationship between perceived relative value and switching intention.

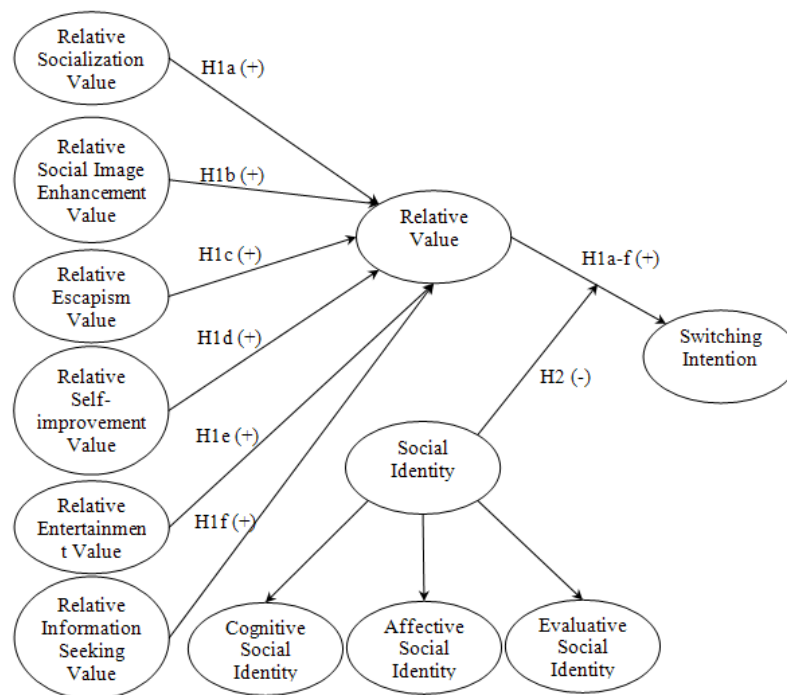


Figure 1. Research model (Note: “(+)” indicates a positive relationship between constructs, whereas “(-)” indicates a negative relationship).

#### 3.1 Relative Value and Switching Intention

Guided by the uses and gratification theory, we first identify six different types of values SNS users may derive from their SNS usage and then conceptualize the *relative value* of a SNS as a multidimensional construct consisting of the six types of values in relative terms.

The first dimension of relative value is *relative socialization value*, which refers to the degree to which SNS users believe that their needs of socialization with others will be better gratified by the competing SNS than by their current SNS. Internet services, including SNSs, are often used as “a facilitator of interpersonal communication and activities” (Korgaonkar & Wolin, 1999). Prior research has demonstrated socialization as an important need individuals seek to gratify in participating in SNSs and other virtual communities (e.g., Chung & Yoo, 2006; Grace-Farfaglia et al., 2006; Lin, 2006; Park et al., 2009; Ridings & Gefen, 2004).

The second dimension of relative value is *relative social image enhancement value*, defined as the extent to which SNSs users believe that they can derive more respect from peers as a result of their

use of the competing SNS as opposed to their current SNS. As an interactive system, a SNS is a channel for an individual to present his/her social image to intended audience and obtain admiration from peers (Lin & Bhattacharjee, 2010). Therefore, a key motivation for SNS use is the enhancement of social image (e.g., using LinkedIn to convey a professional image to potential employers).

*Relative escapism value*, the third dimension, refers to the degree to which SNSs users believe that their need to temporarily escape from the reality will be better satisfied by a competing SNS than by their current SNS. Individuals have been shown to engage in Internet activities to temporarily forget about the real world and thus satisfy their need of escapism (Grace-Farfaglia et al., 2006).

The fourth dimension of relative value is *relative self-improvement value*, defined as the degree to which SNS users believe that their need for continuous learning and competing with others will be better satisfied by the competing SNS than by their current SNS. An interactive social media context not only provides users abundant opportunities to learn but also exposes them to peer pressure, thus driving their need to improve themselves continuously (Grace-Farfaglia et al., 2006). Prior research has also demonstrated self-improvement as an important motivation for SNS use (Grace-Farfaglia et al., 2006; Lin, 2006).

*Relative entertainment value*, the fifth dimension of relative value, refers to the extent to which SNS users believe that their need of deriving enjoyment and pleasure will be better satisfied by the competing SNS than by their current SNS. Entertainment value has been validated as an important determinant of IT adoption and usage in prior literature (e.g., van der Heijden, 2004; Venkatesh, 1999; Venkatesh et al., 2012).

The last dimension of relative value is *relative information seeking value*, which refers to the degree to which SNS users believe that their need of seeking information will be better satisfied by the competing SNS than by the SNS they are currently using. Prior literature has demonstrated information seeking as a salient need individuals seek to gratify by participating in virtual communities (e.g., Furlong, 1989; Grace-Farfaglia et al., 2006; Park et al., 2009; Ridings & Gefen, 2004).

We propose Hypothesis 1 with its corollaries as follows:

H1: A SNS user's perceived relative value of a competing SNS, including relative socialization value (H1a), relative social image enhancement value (H1b), relative escapism value (H1c), relative self-improvement value (H1d), relative entertainment value (H1e), and relative information seeking value (H1f), positively influences his/her intention to switch to the competing SNS.

### 3.2 Moderating Role of Social Identity

Social identity consists of three major components: "a cognitive component (a cognitive awareness of one's membership in a social group—self-categorization), an evaluative component (a positive and negative value connotation attached to this group membership—group self-esteem), and an emotional component (a sense of emotional involvement with that group—affective commitment)" (Ellemers et al., 1999, pp. 372). Each of the three components of an individual's social identity is expected to influence an individual's switching behavior. An individual who becomes aware of his/her membership in a SNS, who has formed positive evaluation of his/her self-worth on the basis of the belonging to the SNS, and who has developed a sense of emotional involvement with the SNS (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) is likely to adhere to the norm of the SNS community and engage more actively in interacting with others on the SNS, and thus be more likely to resist the temptation to switch to a new SNS that he/she has not yet identified with.

Social identity has been found to be an important determinant for continued intention to use SNSs and virtual communities. For instance, Bagozzi and Dholakia (2002) found that both individual determinants (e.g., positive anticipated emotions and desires) and social identity positively influenced an individual's intention to participate in online community. Cheung and Lee (2010) showed that an individual's salient social identity led to heightened collective commitment to use Facebook with his/her friends. Ren et al. (2012) also found that the salience of an individual's social identity within a

virtual group was an important antecedent of his/her attachment and continuous participation in online virtual communities. In the context of our study, a salient social identity that arises from interacting with others on an SNS will foster in the user an attachment to the SNS and reinforce the user's intention to continue using the SNS. Therefore, salient social identity may act as a context constraint, attenuating the impact of the relative value of a competing SNS on user's intention to switch to that SNS. We thus hypothesize:

H2: A SNS user's perceived social identity in the virtual community on his/her current SNS will negatively moderate the relationship between his/her perceived relative value of a competing SNS and his/her intention to switch to that SNS.

## 4 RESEARCH METHOD

### 4.1 Data Collection

A survey was administered to test our research model. A total of 115 current Facebook users participated in this study. At the start of the survey, participants were asked about their opinion of the strongest competitor of "Facebook" with the following question:

"Which of the following social networking websites do you believe is currently the strongest competitor of Facebook?" (Myspace; Xiaonei/Renren; LinkedIn; Google+)

The questionnaire for the survey consists of two major parts to (1) collect respondents' demographic and background information, and (2) obtain their assessment of Facebook (i.e., their current SNS) and a competing SNS, as well as their perceived social identity on Facebook.

A nine-point comparison-based scale (from 1-"Only Applicable to Facebook" to 9-"Only Applicable to THE Competitor" with the mid-point being 5-"Equally Applicable to Facebook and THE Competitor") was developed in this study to capture participants' perception of the relative value of the competing SNS, as compared to Facebook. The other measurements (i.e., for Switching Intention, Cognitive Social Identity, Affective Social Identity, and Evaluative Social Identity) were phrased as questions on seven-point Likert scales, from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (7). All the measurement items were adapted from prior research to fit the context of SNS (see Appendix A).

## 5 DATA ANALYSIS

We employed Partial Least Squares (PLS, as implemented in SmartPLS 2.0.M3) to assess both measurement model and structural model (Hair et al., 2010).

### 5.1 Descriptive Statistics

We collected 115 valid responses in total, among which 50 (43.5%) came from males while 65 (56.5%) came from females. 86.9% of the respondents aged from 18 to 25. 90.4% of the participants had used Facebook for more than 1 year at the time of the survey and over 75% of them spent more than one hour on Facebook per day.

### 5.2 Measurement Model

In this study, reflective constructs include *switching intention*, the six dimensions of *relative value*, and the three components of *social identity*<sup>1</sup>. We validated the reflective constructs following established guidelines (Hair et al., 2010). Individual item's reliability was examined by the loadings of measures with their corresponding construct. All of the loadings exceed 0.7 (see Table 1),

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<sup>1</sup> Social Identity was modeled as a second order reflective construct comprising Cognitive Social Identity, Affective Social Identity, and Evaluative Social Identity.

indicating good item reliability. In addition, internal consistency was assessed by examining composite reliability. The benchmark for acceptable reliability is 0.7. As shown in Table 1, the reliability of all constructs meet the criterion ( $> 0.7$ ), indicating that the measures have good internal consistency. Further, the square root of AVE of every construct in the measurement model is greater than the correlations of the construct with other constructs (see Table 1). No item loads higher on a construct than on the one it intends to measure. The measurements thus provide strong evidence of convergent validity and discriminate validity.

We assessed the validity of the second-order formative construct *relative value* in accordance with Ruiz et al. (2008). First, we tested multi-collinearity among the six dimensions by computing the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) of each dimension (see Table 3). The results show that all the VIFs ranged from 1.31 to 1.97, all below 3.33 and thus indicating an absence of multi-collinearity among the different dimensions of the formative construct. Second, we assessed the coefficients of the paths from the six dimensions to *relative value*. As shown in Table 3, except for *relative entertainment value* and *relative information seeking value*, all the other dimensions are found to be important determinants of *relative value*.

### 5.3 Structural Model

In testing the hypothesized effects, two second order constructs (i.e., *relative value* and *social identity*) were created, aggregating the measurement items of their respective first-order constructs. The overall explanatory power of the model (indicated by R-squared) and the relevant path coefficients are illustrated in Figure 2.

The results show that, as expected, *relative value* of a competing SNS (as compared to the SNS that individuals are currently using) has significant positive effect on individuals' *intention to switch* to the competing SNS. Of the dimensions of *relative value*, *relative socialization value*, *relative social image enhancement value*, and *relative self-improvement value* exert significant positive influence on SNS users' switching intention. However, *relative entertainment value* and *relative information seeking value* are found to have no significant effect on SNS users' switching intention whereas *relative escapism value* has negative impact. Ellison et al. (2007) note that the majority of Facebook users use it as a platform to keep in touch with their acquaintances in real world. Thus, SNS usage is likely to be motivated by a desire to enhance communication with real world people, as opposed to by a desire to escape from the real world, which may explain the negative impact of *relative escape value*. In addition, as the primary goal for using Facebook is to build social network with acquaintances, an individual will be unlikely to leave his/her friends on the SNS that he/she is currently using simply because another SNS is more fun to use or provides more information, which explains the non-significant effect of *relative entertainment value* and *relative information seeking value*.

The results also show that *social identity* exerts significant negative moderating influence on the relationship between *relative value* and *switching intention*. Moreover, all the path coefficients from *social identity* to its three first-order factors are significant at  $p < 0.001$ .

To further assess the contribution of *social identity* as a moderator, we performed a hierarchical analysis with two models in line with Zhang et al. (2009). In the first model, we included only the direct effects of *relative value* and *social identity* on *switching intention*. In the second model, we added the interaction term (i.e., *social identity* \* *relative value*) to examine whether its inclusion can result in more variance explained in *switching intention*. Table 4 shows that, based on the result of a F-test, adding the interaction term significantly improves the variance explained in SNS users' switching intentions, when compared to the baseline model that consists of direct effects only. More importantly, the direct effect of *social identity* on *switching intention* becomes insignificant when the interaction term is introduced, providing strong evidence that *social identity* is indeed more appropriately modelled as a moderator than a direct antecedent.



	Item Loading	Mean	Standard Deviation
Switching Intention (CR=0.93, AVE=0.82)			
INT1	0.90	2.80	1.45
INT2	0.88	2.96	1.68
INT3	0.94	2.44	1.42
Relative Socialization Value (CR=0.90, AVE=0.65)			
RSL1	0.79	4.20	1.73
RSL2	0.86	4.00	1.68
RSL3	0.74	4.17	1.67
RSL4	0.85	4.08	1.80
RSL5	0.78	3.41	1.89
Relative Social Image Enhancement Value (CR=0.87, AVE=0.70)			
RIM1	0.87	4.57	1.23
RIM2	0.84	4.57	1.26
RIM3	0.79	4.42	1.38
Relative Escapism Value (CR=0.85, AVE=0.74)			
REC1	0.92	4.51	1.25
REC2	0.79	4.95	1.26
Relative Self-improvement Value (CR=0.91, AVE=0.67)			
RSI1	0.75	4.35	1.53
RSI2	0.88	4.24	1.62
RSI3	0.87	4.52	1.30
RSI4	0.79	4.62	1.37
RSI5	0.81	4.76	1.32
Relative Entertainment Value (CR=0.92, AVE=0.67)			
RET1	0.87	4.09	1.57
RET2	0.90	3.98	1.56
RET3	0.88	4.09	1.48
RET4	0.81	4.43	1.53
RET5	0.72	4.71	1.46
RET6	0.70	4.82	1.28
Relative Information Seeking Value (CR=0.89, AVE=0.63)			
RIS1	0.81	3.77	1.57
RIS2	0.70	3.52	1.56
RIS3	0.82	4.04	1.56
RIS4	0.84	3.89	1.65
RIS5	0.79	4.31	1.65
Cognitive Social Identity (CR=0.85, AVE=0.75)			
CSI1	0.81	4.72	1.30
CSI2	0.92	4.94	1.18
Affective Social Identity (CR=0.94, AVE=0.89)			
ASI1	0.95	4.63	1.40
ASI2	0.95	4.28	1.42
Evaluative Social Identity (CR=0.98, AVE=0.96)			
ESI1	0.98	4.38	1.27
ESI2	0.98	4.26	1.25

*Table 1. Internal consistency of constructs (Note: CR = Composite Reliability, AVE = Average Variance Extracted).*

	INT	RSL	RIM	REC	RSI	RET	RIS	CSI	ASI	ESI
INT	<b>0.91</b>									
RSL	0.53	<b>0.81</b>								
RIM	0.46	0.57	<b>0.84</b>							
REC	0.13	0.31	0.37	<b>0.86</b>						
RSI	0.51	0.63	0.59	0.54	<b>0.82</b>					
RET	0.45	0.71	0.65	0.49	0.73	<b>0.82</b>				
RIS	0.36	0.53	0.59	0.44	0.59	0.60	<b>0.79</b>			
CSI	-0.17	-0.28	-0.04	0.06	-0.14	-0.21	-0.03	<b>0.87</b>		
ASI	-0.17	-0.15	0.01	0.02	-0.16	-0.10	-0.04	0.56	<b>0.94</b>	
ESI	-0.13	-0.06	-0.07	0.01	-0.08	-0.04	0.07	0.47	0.74	<b>0.98</b>

Table 2. Discriminant validity of constructs (Note: Diagonal elements are square roots of the average variance extracted).

	VIF	Path Coefficients	t-value
RSL	1.69	0.43***	5.80
RIM	1.37	0.29***	4.37
REC	1.34	-0.33***	6.01
RSI	1.31	0.53***	7.80
RET	1.97	-0.05	0.96
RIS	1.60	0.10	1.69

Table 3. Validity of second-order formative construct (Note: VIF = Variance Inflation Factor, \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ).

Construct	Model 1	Model 2
	Coefficient (t-value)	Coefficient (t-value)
RV	0.699*** (42.329)	0.964*** (22.395)
SI	-0.050* (2.261)	-0.027 (0.367)
SI*RV		-0.357*** (6.779)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.504	0.522
R <sup>2</sup> -R <sup>2</sup>		0.018
F-test <sup>a</sup> (p-value)		3.841* (0.025)

Table 4. Summary of two structural models (Note: \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ).

$$^a F = [(R^2 - R'^2) / (\Delta DFd)] / [(1 - R'^2) / (DFn)].$$

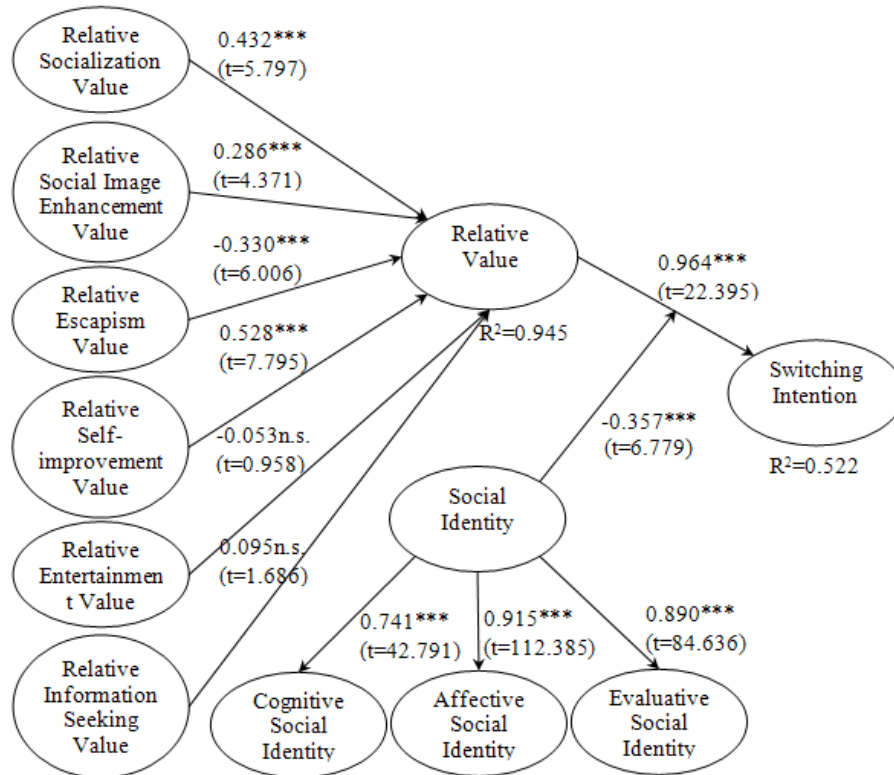


Figure 2. Results of hypothesis testing (Note: \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ).

## 6 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In this study, we draw from the uses and gratification theory and social identity theory to examine the impact of a competing SNS's *relative value* on users' switching intention as well as the moderating role of the users' *social identities* on their current SNS. The results of our survey study establish *relative value* as a strong direct determinant of users' decision to switch SNS. Further, this study provides strong evidence that salient *social identity* plays an important role in mitigating the impact of *relative value* on *switching intention*.

### 6.1 Implications for theory and practice

This study contributes to theory in a number of ways. First, we draw on the uses and gratification theory to identify six types of values individuals seek to satisfy from using SNSs and re-conceptualize them as *relative values* of the competing SNS compared to the current SNS. The results of this study reveal that this conceptualization is successful and that *relative value* is indeed an important determinant of SNS users' switching behavior. Second, informed by social identity theory, this study extends prior research on SNS switching by incorporating an individual's *social identity* on his/her current SNS as a contextual factor that constrains his/her decision to switch to a different SNS. The findings of our study demonstrate the important role *social identity* plays in attenuating the positive influence of *relative value* on *switching intention*. The study enriches our understanding of post-adoption switching behavior in the context of SNSs and lays a foundation for future empirical as well as theoretical work.

The findings of this study also have implications for SNS practitioners. First, the findings of our study reveal several key needs individuals seek to gratify through SNS usage, including needs to socialize, to enhance social image, to learn and improve, and to keep in touch with real world friends. Accordingly, SNS providers can better prioritize their resources to cater to these needs and provide greater value for users, thus reducing their likelihood to switch to a different SNS. Second, the negative moderating effect of social identity suggests that, in order to retain existing users, SNS

providers can create opportunities for users to cultivate their social identities on the SNS (e.g., by implementing functionalities to facilitate online social interactions and the development of shared goals and interests). The more a user identifies with his/her current SNS, the less likely that he/she will switch to a different SNS.

## 6.2 Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, to keep our research model parsimonious, we focused on the direct impact of *relative value* and the moderating impact of *social identity*. Although our model explains 52.2% of the variance in *switching intention*, considered high in social science studies, future research can extend our current model by including additional antecedents and/or moderators. Second, we tested our model with a small sample of 115 participants, most of whom are university students and staff. A larger, more varied sample will improve the generalizability of the findings. Finally, this study focused on the user base of Facebook, and thus care must be taken when extrapolating the findings of this study to other virtual communities.

## Appendix A Measurements Items

Construct	Measurement Items	Source
Switching Intention (INT)	INT1: I am considering switching from Facebook to the competitive social network site. INT2: The likelihood of me switching to the competitive social network site is high. INT3: I am determined to switch to the competitive social network site. [Seven-point “Strongly disagree to Strongly agree” scale]	(Kim et al., 2006)
Relative Socialization Value (RSL)	<b>By using this social network site, I can ...</b>  RSL1: Meet interesting people. RSL2: Feel like I belong to a community. RSL3: Express my opinions. RSL4: Communicate with others. RSL5: Stay in touch with my acquaintances. [Nine-point “‘Only Applicable to Facebook’ to ‘Only Applicable to THE Competitor’ with mid-point being ‘Equally Applicable to Facebook and THE Competitor’” scale]	(Chung & Yoo, 2006; Grace-Farfaglia et al., 2006; Lin, 2006; Park et al., 2009)
Relative Social Image Enhancement Value (RIM)	RIM1: I will get more respect from others when achieving something on this social network site. RIM2: In all honesty, I can impress others by showing how good I am on this social network site. RIM3: By using this social network site, I feel I’m important. [Nine-point “‘Only Applicable to Facebook’ to ‘Only Applicable to THE Competitor’ with mid-point being ‘Equally Applicable to Facebook and THE Competitor’” scale]	(Grace-Farfaglia et al., 2006; Hsu & Lu, 2004; Lin & Bhattacharjee, 2010; Moore & Benbasat, 1991; Venkatesh et al., 2003)
Relative Escapism Value (REC)	<b>By using this social network site, I can ...</b>  REC1: Experience things I can’t in the real world. REC2: Try out new identities. [Nine-point “‘Only Applicable to Facebook’ to ‘Only Applicable to THE Competitor’ with mid-point being ‘Equally Applicable to Facebook and THE Competitor’” scale]	(Grace-Farfaglia et al., 2006)
Relative Self-improvement Value (RSI)	<b>By using this social network site, I can ...</b>  RSI1: Develop my career through group participation. RSI2: Prevent falling behind in the future.	(Grace-Farfaglia et al., 2006; Lin, 2006;

	RSI3: Learn things to improve myself. RSI4: Develop interest in new things. RSI5: Continually learn. <i>[Nine-point “‘Only Applicable to Facebook’ to ‘Only Applicable to THE Competitor’ with mid-point being ‘Equally Applicable to Facebook and THE Competitor’” scale]</i>	Park et al., 2009; Ridings & Gefen, 2004)
Relative Entertainment Value (RET)	<b>Using this social network site will ...</b>  RET1: Give enjoyment to me. RET2: Give fun to me. RET3: Keep me happy. RET4: Stimulate my curiosity. RET5: Lead to my exploration. RET6: Arouse my imagination. <i>[Nine-point “‘Only Applicable to Facebook’ to ‘Only Applicable to THE Competitor’ with mid-point being ‘Equally Applicable to Facebook and THE Competitor’” scale]</i>	(Lin & Mattila, 2006; Sledgianowski & Kulviwat, 2009)
Relative Information Seeking Value (RIS)	<b>By using this social network site, I can ...</b> RIS1: Get information about off-campus events. RIS2: Learn about on-campus events. RIS3: Find information that isn’t available elsewhere. RIS4: Get up-to-date information. RIS5: Obtain news that is customized to my liking. <i>[Nine-point “‘Only Applicable to Facebook’ to ‘Only Applicable to THE Competitor’ with mid-point being ‘Equally Applicable to Facebook and THE Competitor’” scale]</i>	(Chung & Yoo, 2006; Grace-Farfaglia et al., 2006; Lin, 2006; Park et al., 2009; Ridings & Gefen, 2004)
Cognitive Social Identity (CSI)	CSI1: My self-image overlaps with the image of the group of friends I have on Facebook. CSI2: My personal identity and the identity of my group on Facebook match closely when I am actually part of the group and engaging in group activities. <i>[Seven-point “Strongly disagree to Strongly agree” scale]</i>	(Bagozzi & Lee, 2002)
Affective Social Identity (ASI)	ASI1: I’m attached to my group on Facebook. ASI2: My feelings of belongingness are strong toward my group on Facebook. <i>[Seven-point “Strongly disagree to Strongly agree” scale]</i>	(Bagozzi & Lee, 2002)
Evaluative Social Identity (ESI)	ESI1: I am a valuable member of the group on Facebook. ESI2: I am an important member of the group on Facebook. <i>[Seven-point “Strongly disagree to Strongly agree” scale]</i>	(Bagozzi & Lee, 2002)

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